

Stryker

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“I think it’s harder on wives to be back here, because they have more time to think about us being gone,” he added. “They come home to an empty house, but I’m surrounded by my comrades and my buddies all day long. You live in your job.”

The brigade’s deputy commander, Lt. Col. Kevin Hyneman, called the support of families and friends back home “a heroic effort.” Hyneman, who returned Oct. 11, spoke briefly and reminded the returning Soldiers of their place in history.

“You were part of a significant operation to bring freedom to a country that hasn’t tasted it – ever,” he said. “The success that they’re going to have in a couple of years is a direct result of your efforts and your bravery.”

Some of the families gathered at the gym said that, as the time for their Soldiers’ return grew closer, they became more anxious. “The longer he was over there, the more nervous I got,” said Pat Arthur, who traveled from Marion, Ohio, to see her son return Monday.

“I was driving myself crazy,” said Amelia Selph, whose husband Spc. Daniel Selph of Company A, 1st Bn., 23rd Inf., returned Monday. “I must have cleaned the house a million times.”

Other spouses, veterans of previous deployments, took it in stride.

“I’ve been married eight years, and I’ve had him home every other year,” said Virginia Garcia, whose husband Sgt. Bud Garcia of Co. A, returned Monday. “Still, I feel awesome – I’m excited.”

Sheivon Abkemeier was beaming. Her husband, Spc. Nathan Abkemeier of Company C, 1st Bn., 23rd Inf., returned Monday, and she was anxious to take him to their new home, which he had never seen.

“It feels wonderful,” she said. “I’ve got a baby on the way, a husband at home, I’ve got a new house — I’m doing good.”



Jason Kaye

Lt. Col. William "Buck" James, commander of the 1st Bn., 23rd Inf., hugs his son Will, daughter Eden and wife Heather after the welcome home ceremony Monday.

1st Corps

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Every year, 1st Corps Soldiers link up with Japanese counterparts to improve foreign relations and bi-lateral military capabilities on an exercise called Yama Sakura — at its core, a huge, complicated video game where the U.S. military and Japan Ground Self-Defense Force drive a fictional invading force out of Japan.

It’s all training to prepare for potential real-world threats where the countries’ militaries might need to effectively combine forces.

Officers and enlisted personnel have run through a checklist of needed capabilities to make sure everything operates smoothly during this pre-exercise exercise and the major exercise on Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan’s major islands.

But none of it would be possible if Soldiers couldn’t communicate easily and accurately with each other — if sections couldn’t coordinate efforts to win the mission.

“Without us, nothing works,” said Sgt. 1st Class Juan Rosario, data platoon sergeant for the 1st Corps G6 section. “We will refine all the glitches.”

One of the first to arrive and last to leave, Soldiers in charge of setting up networks and troubleshooting software help weave together different sections that don’t work together on a regular basis in garrison.

In order to achieve the set missions, all military assets in the corps need to mesh seamlessly. Sections can work toward that objective now by working out the kinks in software and identifying training needs.

“We know there will be some changes when we get to Japan,” said Col. Rod Phillips, the G6. “But clearly, we’ll get the 90-percent solution here.”

While reconfiguring software and

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Maj. Keith Markham

slides from previous exercises, 1st Corps Soldiers can recognize strengths and weaknesses prior to the major exercise located an ocean away.

In addition, Soldiers have to learn a new way of planning operations and measuring how effective measures aimed at defeating the enemy really are.

Instead of looking at a campaign in one way — overwhelming the problem with firepower — leaders plan a multifaceted approach to win the war.

This is the first time many Soldiers have encountered the new effects-based operations, and the current exercise will give them a chance to become familiar with the technology before sharing the knowledge with their Japanese counterparts.

“If we don’t understand our systems and how to use them, then we definitely can’t pass it on to the Japanese,” said Maj. Keith Markham, lead battle major for the exercise.

Mastering the increasingly developed technology will make the process go much smoother. Using a more Web-based information management software — essentially, a big chat room where Soldiers can exchange ideas and information — will improve the Army’s flexibility.

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Iraq

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“I hope you can imagine what kind of isolation we were living in,” Mahmood said. “We didn’t have the right to have access to the Internet. We only had two TV channels under the government control. No cell

phones were allowed, no newspapers from outside the country. Now people are getting an education,” Mahmood said. “They have the right to training. They have the right to leave the country. They are connected with other parts of the world.”

Change has meant that Iraqis now have a hand in shaping their future.

“Everyone is involved in the decision-

making,” Mahmood said. “We have the choice. We have the right to make a choice.”

Such as the choice to join the police or the army.

“Despite all the bombings ... the very next day, you can see another line at any police or army recruiting center,” Mahmood said. “They want to join.”

“Some great and positive things are hap-

pening, but I don’t know if many people here know about it,” said Mahmood, adding that she was surprised they went uncovered by the U.S. media. “I was amazed. Nothing good was reported in the media, just the bombings, just the killings.”

Said one member of Mahmood’s audience at the Stone Education Center: “We’d love to see you on TV.”

Others asked if Mahmood could put them in touch with Iraqi families by mail or email. She said she would try to do that.

Linda Ayers, whose husband, Sgt. 1st Class G.W. Ayers, is currently in Iraq, liked what Mahmood had to say.

“We don’t hear this a lot,” Ayers said. “It’s about time that we heard this. We have heard nothing but (the) negative.”